As a boy, I never knew where my mother was from—where she was born, who her parents were. When I asked she’d say, “God made me.” When I asked if she was white, she’d say, “I’m light-skinned,” and change the subject. She raised twelve black children and sent us all to college and in most cases graduate school. Her children became doctors, professors, chemists, teachers—yet none of us even knew her maiden name until we were grown. It took me fourteen years to unearth her remarkable story—the daughter of an Orthodox Jewish Rabbi, she married a black man in 1942—and she revealed it more as a favor to me than out of any desire to revisit her past. Here is her life as she told it to me, and betwixt and between the pages of her life you will find mine as well (xix).

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*I’m dead.*

 *You want to talk about my family and here I been dead to them for fifty years. Leave me alone. Don’t bother me. They want no parts of me and me I don’t want no parts of them. Hurry up and get this interview over with. I want to watch* Dallas*. See, my family, if you had been part of them, you wouldn’t have time for this foolishness, your roots, so to speak. You’d be better off watching the Three Stooges than to interview them, like go interview my father, forget it. He’d have a heart attack if he saw you. He’s dead now anyway, or if not he’s 150 years old (1).*

What I notice (try to describe or classify the lead styles)